

SPIRIT LAKE

---

A Play in Two Acts

By Barry A. A. Dillinger

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ANNE, a moody goth chick

HOWARD, a brilliant and sensitive geek

BRAM, a macho jock (boyfriend of MARY)

MARY, a lascivious teen (girlfriend of BRAM)

PETER, an intelligent no-nonsense boy

STEPHEN, an obnoxious kid

SHIRLEY, an ethereal otherworldly figure

SETTINGS

Spirit Lake campsite

PRODUCTION NOTES

Present day at the campsite near Spirit Lake in Ketchikan, Alaska. Six friends are gathering up at the lake waiting for the spirit of their dead friend to make an appearance.

Props are a few logs around a campfire ring, background scenery of mountains, trees and sky. A small hilly rise behind fire ring that hides Spirit Lake. Tree and underbrush facades are DL and DR.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the Heritage Diner in Hackensack, New Jersey for supplying the placemat in 1978 upon which he penned this story for the first time.

**ACT ONE**

SCENE 1

Sounds of nature (crickets, frogs, owls, water gently lapping) during early morning. Voices grow in volume.

MARY (OFF)

(shouting)

Do you think it's still here?

(MARY runs into campsite (DR) and up small incline, stopping abruptly at top.)

MARY

(shouting)

Oh, my God, guys! It looks exactly the same! The lake's still here!

(MARY does a little dance as the others (BRAM, PETER, STEPHEN, ANNE AND HOWARD) appear.)

BRAM

Did you expect the lake to NOT be here?

MARY

I'm going for a swim!

(MARY disappears behind the incline and a splash is heard. BRAM runs off to follow her. STEPHEN and HOWARD also follow with a laugh, leaving PETER and ANNE. More splashing.)

PETER

Wow, this is so weird.

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ANNE

I know, right?

(ANNE sits on a log by the fire  
ring.)

PETER

You remember the last time we were here?

(ANNE nods.)

PETER

The whole thing seems like a dream.

ANNE

You mean, nightmare.

PETER

True.

(STEPHEN appears at the top of the  
rise.)

STEPHEN

Mary's taking off her top!

PETER

(to ANNE)

Be right back!

(PETER runs up the incline and  
disappears as whooping and more  
splashing is heard.)

ANNE

(scoffing)

Slut.

(ANNE looks at the sky.)

ANNE

Are you there, Shirley. Can you hear me?

### 3. SPIRIT LAKE

(HOWARD appears at the top of the rise.)

HOWARD

She ever answer you?

ANNE

What happened? Princess get dressed again?

HOWARD

You know I don't like it when Mary does that.

(HOWARD walks down and stands beside ANNE.)

ANNE

Well, well, well. Chivalry isn't dead.

HOWARD

Sometimes I feel like I can actually sense her, you know?

ANNE

(doubtful)

Really. Never took you for a true believer.

HOWARD

You kidding? I'm the original believer.

(More whooping and wolf whistles.)

ANNE

She's such a slut!

HOWARD

Don't let it bother you.

(ANNE scowls toward the sky, but then her face softens.)

ANNE

So, what do you think? Shirley gonna make an appearance this year?



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HOWARD

You said you dreamt it, right? So, yeah. I trust you.

ANNE

I'm excited about it. But I'm also a little scared.

HOWARD

Why's that?

ANNE

I feel like there's something about Shirley that doesn't make sense.

HOWARD

I don't understand.

ANNE

Like...

(ANNE stands and paces  
thoughtfully.)

ANNE

You ever think about the accident?

HOWARD

I try not to.

ANNE

Well, yeah, of course. But, Howard... Shirley was the only one taken from us.

HOWARD

And?

ANNE

And I just don't think that's fair.

HOWARD

Life's not fair, Annie.

ANNE

That's a great comeback.

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(PETER and STEPHEN reappear over the rise, whispering to each other.)

ANNE

Was it good for you?

STEPHEN

Oh, yeah! But they're making out in the lake now, so...

PETER

Show's over.

ANNE

Oh, poor boys. How will you ever survive one day without Mary's boobs?

PETER

Don't be jealous, Annie.

ANNE

Jealous? For your information, Peter, mine happen to be a full size bigger than Mary's!"

STEPHEN

(laughing)

I never noticed.

ANNE

As a matter of fact, Shirley was also a D-cup!

STEPHEN

(to PETER)

Boob envy.

ANNE

Are you dense, Stephen? Do you even know what envy means? Oh, wait! Of course you do. Every time you look at Howard, you get all green in the face!

(HOWARD looks embarrassed.)

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STEPHEN

Okay, first of all, why would I possibly be envious of Howard?

ANNE

Well, we've all seen you in your baby swim trunks...LITTLE Stevie.

STEPHEN

You are such a bit-

PETER

Could you guys please stop fighting? You do this every time we come up here! Acting like a bunch of third-graders!

ANNE

Oh, speaking of third-graders, Stephen, how's your girlfriend? You still have to change her diapers?

(BRAM and MARY appear at the top of the rise, dripping wet. She is tying her hair back.)

BRAM

We talking about Wendy again?

STEPHEN

Yup. Every time I mention Mary's boobs, Annie attacks my ex.

(BRAM laughs as he pulls MARY down the incline by her hand.)

BRAM

Did you just say, your "ex?"

STEPHEN

Yeah! My ex-girlfriend.

BRAM

C'mon, Stephen. You and I both know she's not your ex.

STEPHEN

She is, too!

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BRAM

I mean, don't get me wrong...she's hot and all...for a thirteen-year-old.

PETER

(laughing)

Oh, my God.

STEPHEN

I was fourteen and a half, for your information!

MARY

(chuckling)

And a half?

BRAM

Oh, then that makes all the difference.

STEPHEN

Morons!

(HOWARD begins collecting twigs and sticks from around the campsite.)

MARY

Stephen, just admit it. You never had a girlfriend.

STEPHEN

You're an imbecile.

ANNE

Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't everyone used to call you never-been-kissed-Stevie?

(Silence.)

STEPHEN

(pointing)

Anne's got boob envy!

(ANNE lobs a stick at Stephen who yelps.)

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ANNE

Unbelievable little turd!

(ANNE rises and walks off into the woods (DL). PETER silently follows.)

MARY

(sitting down)

Her boobs are bigger than mine, you know.

HOWARD

That's what Annie said.

MARY

(angrily)

But not by much!

BRAM

Relax. It's not a competition. Besides, yours are firmer.

STEPHEN

Is that even a word?

BRAM

Look it up, genius.

STEPHEN

Howard, you wanna help me get some firewood?

(HOWARD looks down at the pathetic collection of twigs in his hand and drops them on the ground.)

HOWARD

Sure thing.

(HOWARD follows STEPHEN off into the woods (DR). MARY begins bobbing her head sideways to knock water out of her ears. BRAM puts a foot up on one of the logs and looks down at the fire ring.)

9. SPIRIT LAKE

BRAM

Weird being here.

MARY

What?

BRAM

(loudly)

I said, it's weird, isn't it? Being here?

MARY

I guess. And why are you yelling? I'm right next to you.

(MARY squeezes out her wet hair,  
then stops to look up at BRAM.)

MARY

You think maybe we'll see her tonight?

BRAM

Why are you asking me?

MARY

I dunno. I thought maybe you'd have an opinion. She was  
your (finger quotes) best friend."

BRAM

Shut it.

MARY

Really? Shut it? That's your response? Shirley deserves -

BRAM

Shut the hell up!

MARY

What?

BRAM

She's gone, all right? Just stop talking about it!

MARY

I have just as much right as you do! As anyone here does!  
We were all her friends!

(PETER appears from DL.)

PETER

Hey, hey! Romeo and Juliette. What gives?

(Silence. Peter seats himself on  
another log nearby.)

MARY

Bram doesn't want to talk about Shirley.

BRAM

Didn't I just say, 'shut it'?

MARY

Did you miss the part where I ignored you?

(Silence.)

PETER

Anyone remember the time Shirley put Nair in Stephen's  
shampoo bottle?

BRAM

(snickering)

Holy crap.

PETER

Even his eyebrows disappeared!

(MARY begins giggling.)

BRAM

I don't think he could grow a moustache for a year!

PETER

But, man, he's got some fuzzy ears, though, don't he?

(The trio bursts out in laughter.)

BRAM

Best prank ever.

PETER

But then he tells her he pissed in her canteen! Remember that?

MARY

And she vomits all over him!

(They continue to crack up as HOWARD and STEPHEN return (DR) with arms full of small logs and sticks.)

STEPHEN

What's so hilarious?

MARY

(stifling laughter)

Nothing...

BRAM

Baldy.

(More uproarious laughter. HOWARD joins in, not really knowing why.)

STEPHEN

Oh, ha, ha! You guys are so funny.

(They continue laughing.)

STEPHEN

I got her back, though, didn't I? Peed right in her canteen!

BRAM

Dude, she had chili for lunch and she up-chucked all over you!

STEPHEN

Whatever.



PETER

You looked like a Mexican omelette, Stevie!

STEPHEN

You idiots are so immature.

MARY

Like your ex-girlfriend!

(Yet more laughter.)

STEPHEN

That's it! I'm not coming up here anymore with you jerks!

MARY

Oh, calm down, Stevie. We're just kidding around.

STEPHEN

Well, how come nobody kids around with Bram or Peter?

(STEPHEN looks at Howard.)

STEPHEN

Or Howard? He's much more weird than I am.

HOWARD

Weirder.

STEPHEN

You see? Even he admits it.

HOWARD

No, Stephen, you misspoke. You meant to say, 'he's much weirder than me.'

STEPHEN

No, I didn't. I meant what I said.

PETER

Which is exactly why your essays suck.

HOWARD

You'll never be a successful author if you can't even master basic grammar. Oh, and grammar is spelled G-R-A-M-M -

STEPHEN

I know how to spell grammar, dork!

HOWARD

Just saying.

(ANNE saunters back on stage (DL)  
and approaches the group.)

BRAM

Where you been, Annie?

(PETER begins stealthily waving in  
BRAM'S direction, effectively  
communicating 'don't ask'.)

ANNE

(to PETER)

Peter, you don't have to do that. Anyway, Abraham doesn't even know what that (mimics frantic waving) means.

BRAM

It's Bram, Annemarie. Only my grandmother calls me Abraham.

ANNE

(batting eyelashes and using  
southern belle accent)

Oh, of course it is. How silly of me to forget that you're so Steve-McQueen-cool and we're all so captivated by your clueless rebel aura.

(BRAM scoffs, laughs, then looks  
down at Mary who shakes her head in  
disgust.)

BRAM

Did she just insult me again?

ANNE

Oh, my God! Shirley would have slapped you upside the head, Bram.

(Silence again. Those remaining standing find a seat around the fire ring.)

HOWARD

I really miss her.

(PETER puts a hand on HOWARD'S shoulder.)

BRAM

(quietly)

Dude, don't you dare hug him or I will vomit.

(PETER chuckles.)

STEPHEN

Me and Shirley made out once.

(The others erupt in disgust at Stephen's comment.)

PETER

In your wet dreams.

ANNE

Shirley never kissed any of us...least of all, you.

HOWARD

That's not true.

(All eyes move to HOWARD.)

HOWARD

I mean, she kissed me first. Right down there by Tiki Joe.

(HOWARD points into audience. All eyes follow.)

BRAM

No shit?

(HOWARD shakes his head.)

STEPHEN

Bullshit!

HOWARD

Stephen, I know it's hard to imagine me kissing Shirley, but trust me. We were talking about her poetry and some of her short stories and I told her how much I loved her writing style and...before I knew it...we were kissing.

STEPHEN

Get the hell outa here! Seriously? I don't believe it.

ANNE

You are such a child, Stephen. What is so devastatingly hard to believe about Shirley sucking face with Howard?

HOWARD

We didn't actually suck face -

(ANNE holds up a hand in his direction and he shuts his mouth.)

ANNE

I mean, really. Howard's got a quiet charm about him and Shirley...well, you know?

PETER

Know what?

ANNE

You know. Her fetish...thingy. Remember?

(EVERYONE answers 'no'. ANNE huffs loudly.)

ANNE

She had a thing for guys with glasses.

BRAM

No shit?

MARY

(with sudden realization)

Oh, my God, yeah! She loved Charlie Sheen in that Wild Thing movie. You know...where he got glasses and stuff?

BRAM

It was called Major League, Mary.

MARY

Whatever. The stupid football movie.

ANNE

Listen, she had the hots for Howard for years! Real bad.

(HOWARD puts his hands in his pockets and looks away.)

STEPHEN

That's a load of crap, Annie! You're just saying that because she's not here to defend herself.

ANNE

The only load of crap here, Stevie, are the stories you tell us every freaking day about your ex-girlfriend.

PETER

Oh, snap.

MARY

Come to think of it...Shirley did ask me one time if I ever saw the bulge in Howard's shorts.

HOWARD

Oh, Jesus.

(HOWARD hides his face in his arms on his knees.)

BRAM

C'mon, Mary, you're making him blush.

MARY

Sorry, but it's true. She had a thing for Howard. What can I say?

HOWARD

(muffled)

Sorry I mentioned anything about the kissing.

PETER

Don't be sorry about that, Howard.

BRAM

Dude, you can't help it if you're irresistible to chicks! I mean, I've gotten used to it.

(MARY slaps his arm.)

PETER

Imagine what their kids would've looked like, though.

HOWARD

(looking up again)

Hopefully, they would've had her eyes.

(Murmured agreement. Silence.)

PETER

I'm just gonna put it out there.

(The others face PETER.)

PETER

That driver was on the wrong side of the road.

BRAM

Yeah, he was.

ANNE

It wasn't her fault.

BRAM

(to ANNE)

So, Pete said you had a dream this time, huh?

ANNE

(quietly)

Yeah.

MARY

You think this is it? Is this the time you were telling us about?

STEPHEN

(looking up)

There's gonna be a full moon tonight.

ANNE

I think it's really gonna happen tonight.

PETER

I've got goosebumps! (Points to arm.) Check it out!

HOWARD

There's something to be said about the visions we see.

BRAM

Got that right, brother.

STEPHEN

What happens if she shows up? Just like Annie says?

(The group looks around at each other.)

STEPHEN

I mean, can we talk with her? Ask her questions?

ANNE

I dunno. All I do know is that the feeling is really strong and I don't think we'll have to wait long before she actually shows up this time.

MARY

So, what would you ask her, Stevie? If you could, I mean?

STEPHEN

Crap, I don't know. I mean, there's so many things I wanna know. Where has she been all this time? Was she sad, happy...trapped?

BRAM

I'd wanna know if she missed me...us.

MARY

Yeah.

PETER

I think she has missed us. Look at how much we've missed her, you know?

HOWARD

I wonder if she still thinks of stories to write. Like, what does she do to pass the time.

BRAM

(to ANNE)

So, you're sure that she's going to make an appearance, right?

ANNE

Bram, I'm not a hundred percent, but...yeah. I think she will come to us at the right time tonight. I think that she'll be able to see us and we'll be able to see her.

MARY

God, I can't help but admit that I'm a little scared. I mean, my mom always told me about this witchy stuff before and how it's not natural.

ANNE

It's not witchcraft, Mary. It's just a vision that I get...like a dream...and I can see Shirley coming to us like an angel, glowing white and shimmery.

PETER

Will she recognize us, I wonder.



BRAM

Oh, definitely.

STEPHEN

You think she'll be...messed up.

(A blast of anger and yelling.)

STEPHEN

Oh, c'mon, guys, you know what I mean. I'm not being sadistic. I just mean...after the accident and all...

BRAM

Would you just shut your trap about the accident! We all know what happened. We don't need to go over this every single time we come here!

PETER

He's right. The driver was drunk...obviously. He was on the wrong side of the road and Shirley did everything she could to swerve out of the way. She was trying to save not only her own life, but all of our lives...and the life of that drunk driver.

(ANNE begins to tear up as Peter reaches over to rub her back.)

PETER

When Shirley left us, Annie's right...it wasn't fair. It was shitty. But whatever the reason, Shirley is in a better place and ready to make contact with us because we miss her and love her.

BRAM

Here, here.

HOWARD

So, what do we do in the meantime?

ANNE

Well, we've still got a few hours. I guess we could do some hiking or...

MARY

Spin the bottle!

(ANNE is scowling.)

ANNE

Do you have a bottle, Mary?

MARY

(confused and scanning the  
ground)

I've got a stick!

(MARY quickly grabs a stick from  
the dirt and waves it around.)

BRAM

That won't work.

MARY

Strip poker!

(The boys all seem to perk up at  
that suggestion.)

ANNE

(sarcastically)

Does anyone have a deck of cards?

(A lot of shaking heads.)

HOWARD

Truth or dare?

(There is murmured agreement.)

STEPHEN

I object.

PETER

(sarcastically)

You object?

BRAM

What is this? The People's Court?

HOWARD

You object to truth or dare?

STEPHEN

I don't like the game. It's dumb.

ANNE

Hold on. You were just on board with Mary's spin-the-stick game, but truth or dare is "dumb?"

PETER

How about truth or stick?

(General laughter.)

BRAM

Truth or dare, raise your hand.

(BRAM raises his own hand, as the others follow. STEPHEN looks sour.)

STEPHEN

Fine. But I go first.

BRAM

Sounds fair to me.

(The others nod their approval.)

STEPHEN

(rubbing hands together)

Howard. Truth or dare?

HOWARD

Truth.

PETER

This should be really anti-climactic. I mean, when has Howard ever lied.

STEPHEN

Hey, Peter. It's my turn!

PETER

Geez, all right, man. Truth or dare Nazi.

MARY

Oh, my God, Peter, shut up.

STEPHEN

Howard? Did you really kiss Shirley over there by Tiki Bob?

HOWARD

No.

(Gasps.)

STEPHEN

Ha! I knew it! You filthy, lying dog!

HOWARD

Stephen, I didn't kiss her over there by Tiki Bob. I kissed her over there by Tiki JOE.

BRAM

Oh, crap! I didn't even catch that.

PETER

Yeah, Stephen. You screwed up. It is Tiki Joe. Shirley named him that after Mary stuck a cigarette in his mouth. Remember?

STEPHEN

(disappointedly)

Yeah, yeah. Whatever.

ANNE

Howard, it's your turn.

(HOWARD peers around at the others  
for a moment and stops on STEPHEN.)

STEPHEN

Oh, great.

HOWARD

Mary.

(More gasps.)

MARY

(giggly)

Yikes!

HOWARD

Truth or dare?

STEPHEN

(whispering)

Dare. Dare.

(ANNE punches STEPHEN in the arm.)

MARY

Dare - no, truth!

PETER

Are you sure?

MARY

Can I do both?

ANNE

Those aren't the rules, Mary.

MARY

Okay, whatever. Truth.

HOWARD

Where did you have sex your first time.

BRAM

Oh, this is an easy one.

(MARY looks uncomfortable.)

ANNE

Oh, please don't tell me you've had a sudden onset of moral trepidation?

MARY

(confused)

I don't know what you just said, but I don't like your tone, young lady.

(The others laugh.)

HOWARD

Well?

MARY

Can I skip this question?

BRAM

What are you talking about? This is an easy one, babe! Just tell him.

MARY

(slightly agitated)

Let me talk for myself.

BRAM

It was the Burger Queen parking lot! C'mon!

MARY

I'm going to pass.

HOWARD

You can't pass, Mary.

BRAM

What are you talking about, pass? It was at the Burger Queen! The Burger Queen!

MARY

(yelling)

That wasn't my first time!

(Silence.)

BRAM

(confused)

What? Yes, it was! The second time was at the Deer Mountain cabin. Is that the time you're thinking of?

ANNE

All right, it doesn't matter. Let's move on.

BRAM

No, no. This is important. The first time was at the Burger Queen. I remember it really well!

MARY

Bram. (BRAM looks at MARY.) That time at Burger Queen wasn't MY first time.

(BRAM looks momentarily flummoxed.  
Then he registers understanding.)

BRAM

You little slut.

MARY

(screaming)

What the hell is wrong with you? Are you crazy! I already told you, you idiot! You weren't my first!

BRAM

You did it with Aaron Jurgenschneizer?

MARY

Jurgensen! Jurgensen! No, I didn't do it with Aaron!

BRAM

Oh, not Campbell Murray! That dunce!

MARY

Campbell Murray's gay, you jerk!

BRAM

Then, who? (Suddenly looks at HOWARD) Please tell me you didn't do it with Howard!

MARY

Oh, my God! You are such an insensitive, pathetic, jealous nitwit!

(MARY stands and storms off into the woods (DL). BRAM follows her.)

BRAM

Was it Nick Dunlop? He's so fat!

(Uncomfortable silence.)

PETER

Was it Nick Dunlop?

(Everyone begins snickering.)

ANNE

It was Johnny Geisland.

STEPHEN

No shit?

ANNE

She snuck him through her bedroom window and afterward, he...

(ANNE begins laughing.)

ANNE

He fell down the cliff and broke his leg! Right up on Harris Street!

HOWARD

Holy crap!

PETER

I remember when he was on crutches! Holy mackerel!

STEPHEN

She did it with Johnny? Really?



ANNE

(sarcastically)

What now, Stevie? You jealous of the guy with bad acne and greasy hair?

(The laughing continues.)

ANNE

(stops laughing)

Oh, and if anyone of you tells Mary I told you, I will personally make you wish you fell off that cliff, too.

(The three look very serious and then burst out laughing.)

(A sudden, eerie, ethereal voice cuts into the laughter.)

SHIRLEY (OFF)

(echoing)

Annie? Can you hear me?

(The group stops dead in their conversation. ANNE stands quickly, looking up into the sky.)

ANNE

I hear you! Shirley, I hear you!

(No answer. The boys look frightened, but composed.)

ANNE

Are you here? Shirley, can you hear me?

(A long quiet. BRAM and MARY come running onto the scene from DL.)

MARY

Did you hear that?

BRAM

It sounded like the whole forest was talking!

ANNE  
(agitated)

Shh!

(Quiet.)

ANNE  
Shirley? Can you hear me? (Long beat.) Are you here?

SHIRLEY (OFF)  
(echoing)

I'm coming.

(Everyone remains in stunned  
silence as lights dim.)

**END ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO**

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP ON:

Sounds of night time nature  
(crickets, frogs, owls, water  
gently lapping). Friends are  
sitting on logs around fire ring  
as campfire is burning and  
illuminating group. Absent from  
the group is ANNE. Moonlight is  
beaming down from above.

PETER

How long's it been?

STEPHEN

(consulting watch and tapping  
it)

Dunno. This stupid thing stopped working.

BRAM

Anne's been gone for, like, three hours or something.

HOWARD

It's only been an hour.

BRAM

And you know it's been an hour because...

HOWARD

Because it's been an hour.

BRAM

You got no watch, but you know it's been an hour -

MARY

Oh, my God, shut up, Bram! Leave him alone!

BRAM

Leave him alone? (A long beat.) Should I leave him alone with you? Is that what you mean?

MARY

(angrily)

You're such an infant, I swear.

BRAM

Infant? So I'm an infant because I don't like being lied to?

PETER

Jesus! Guys, give me a break!

(MARY and BRAM sit quietly.)

PETER

Is it not the most amazing thing to have heard Shirley's voice from who knows where? And you guys are fighting over crap that happened ages ago?

STEPHEN

That voice sounded like her, but man, it really creeped me out.

HOWARD

I'm going to have to agree with you there, Stephen. It was just eerie to hear it coming out of the air like...like she was standing right beside us.

PETER

Right, right. I really did feel like she was whispering in my ear.

STEPHEN

At first I didn't think it was real, but when everyone reacted the same way, I knew it was Shirley.

HOWARD

But what did she mean by "I'm coming"? I mean, is she walking here...floating here...appearing here?

BRAM

Maybe she's going to visit us in spirit. Like a ghost or something.

HOWARD

You believe in ghosts?

BRAM

Me, personally? No. No way. But that voice...I don't know. It didn't sound real to me.

PETER

Anne said something about her arriving here in spirit form. Her dream or vision was that Shirley would be coming to us in a shimmery light or something.

STEPHEN

I miss Shirley and everything, guys, but I swear, if she shows up as a ghost, I'll shit myself.

BRAM

Where the hell is Annie? She went off for a walk three hours ago and -

HOWARD

An hour -

BRAM

(belligerent)

Yeah, yeah! I know, I know! It's only been an hour. So, what? We gonna debate about that, too? (Stands.) I'm going to find her.

PETER

Just let her be, Bram. She said she'd be back when she was ready.

BRAM

Ready for what? Ready to commute with the spirits?

HOWARD

Commune -

BRAM

(pointing threateningly)

So help me, Howard, if you correct me one more time...

(ANNE suddenly appears from DL)

ANNE

I see we've reached the stage where Bram is threatening to beat everyone up again.

BRAM

Holy crap, there you are! It's about time you showed up.

PETER

How'd it go?

ANNE

Shirley will be here within the hour.

STEPHEN

Did she, uh...she tell you that, did she?

ANNE

(mimicking)

Yes, she, uh...she told me that, she did.

BRAM

So, what's the deal? She coming in a canoe. (Laughs.) By moonbeams?

MARY

Jesus, Bram. Why do you have to be such a dick all the time?

BRAM

Well, if I wasn't a dick all the time...

(Everyone turns to face him as he hesitates a moment longer than necessary.)

BRAM

(angrily)

Oh, you're all SO brilliant, aren't you!

(Silence.)

ANNE

Anyway. Shirley has given me signs that she will be here very soon and that all we need to do is sit quietly, think wonderful thoughts of her, and she'll be guided to us through our memories.

HOWARD

Can we talk, or does it have to be quiet?

ANNE

No, I think we can -

BRAM

Oh, c'mon, Howard, she doesn't know! She's just guessing.

ANNE

Seriously? Just guessing? You heard her voice, didn't you? I mean, it wasn't just the wind, Bram!

BRAM

You probably set this whole thing up.

ANNE

(sarcastically)

Oh, yes, Bram. You caught me. I cannot believe you've figured out how I came up here twelve hours earlier, got on a ladder and rigged up a whole bunch of speakers in the trees that would play a prerecorded message in a voice that sounded exactly like Shirley's!

BRAM

You set it up.

(ANNE shrieks into the air in frustration.)

STEPHEN

Far be it from me to defend the Queen of Drama, but -

ANNE

Oh, no, you don't, little Stevie. I don't need you shielding me from Sir Gripes-a-lot.

PETER

Let's just stop arguing and remember why we're here. We've got a hour to kill. Right, Annie?

(ANNE nods.)

STEPHEN

So, I'm thinking of a person, real or fictional, or a cartoon character.

BRAM

Oh, so now we're playing games your thirteen-year-old girlfriend taught you?

STEPHEN

Ex-girlfriend. And yes, it's a fun game.

BRAM

For dweebs and pleeb.

HOWARD

What IS a 'pleeb' anyway?

STEPHEN

C'mon, I'm ready. Person or cartoon character, real or fictional.

BRAM

Holy crap! I got it! Is it...your mom?

STEPHEN

No, it's yours!

HOWARD

Is it an actor?

STEPHEN

No



PETER  
An astronaut?

STEPHEN  
Nope.

MARY  
Is it Marilyn Monroe?

STEPHEN  
(crossing arms and smirking.)  
No.

ANNE  
Is it a political leader?

STEPHEN  
Yes.

ANNE  
Yes! I go again. Okay, is it Bill Clinton?

STEPHEN  
No.

ANNE  
Darn!

BRAM  
Is it...your mom?

STEPHEN  
Oh, my God, you're such a pea-brain!

HOWARD  
Hold it! Is it the Illuminati?

BRAM  
The what?

STEPHEN  
That's correct, Howard! Wow!

PETER

Hold on! I call bullcrap!

STEPHEN

Now what?

PETER

The Illuminati? It's not even a person!

BRAM

What the hell is Illuminati?

MARY

It's Italian for ignorant, Bram.

STEPHEN

Name one figure who represents the Illuminati.

PETER

(scoffing)

You can't. No one knows who they are. (A beat.) They, Stephen...THEY.

STEPHEN

Wait a minute. If no one knows -

ANNE

Oh, here we go.

STEPHEN

No, wait. If no one knows who the Illuminati is, then how can you state...unequivocally...that they aren't a "he" or "she?"

PETER

(stammering)

Everyone knows that...that...there's more than one!

STEPHEN

Oh, everyone.

PETER

It's dumb. No one ever conceived the Illuminate as one person.

STEPHEN

Well, for the purposes of this particular game, I did.

HOWARD

And I win. So, it's my turn.

BRAM

I'm done with this stupid waste of time. Annie, how long? Any clue? You got goosepimples or something?

ANNE

(annoyed)

Do you think this is like a scheduled appointment?

BRAM

Look, (pointing) the moon is out, the day is July tenth...a Saturday no less...the exact day of the accident, and we're all here! What else are we missing?

HOWARD

Shirley.

(Everyone is quiet.)

ANNE

I don't know what to tell you, Bram. Everything is right. Everything you just said. I thought it would be happening already, but...

PETER

So, what is it? You know, that you feel, I mean?

ANNE

It's hard to describe. (A beat.) Almost like I can smell her clothing or feel her touching me.

BRAM

I hope we didn't come all the way up here again for nothing.

MARY

Relax for once, would you, Bram?

ANNE

Today is definitely...feels different than all the other times we waited.

BRAM

That's what you said last year.

(MARY punches BRAM in the arm.)

BRAM

Oh, my God, woman!

HOWARD

I got another game, guys.

BRAM

No more geek Olympics!

PETER

I'm up for it.

(MARY nods.)

STEPHEN

What game?

HOWARD

Just a question game.

(BRAM puts his head in his hands in frustration and moans loudly.)

HOWARD

Annie? If you could write one great novel...one that would influence the world...what would be its storyline?

BRAM

Oh, c'mon! This is worse than the Italian game!

MARY

Shut up, you imbecile and listen!

ANNE

I don't know, Howard.

HOWARD

Take your time.

(ANNE looks half-interested as she gazes around them at the scenery.)

ANNE

Does it have to be about any particular subject?

HOWARD

You're the author.

STEPHEN

Can it be about sex?

PETER

You'll get your turn, pervert.

(The others laugh.)

ANNE

I had this dream once about this frustrated guy who loses his wife. He's so upset that he contemplates suicide. And, like, before he can do it, another man attacks him and -

BRAM

Gross, Annie!

ANNE

Not sexually, you idiot! He bites him and turns him into a vampire!

(Everyone erupts in appreciation.)

PETER

Hey, that's pretty good!

MARY

You should totally write that!

STEPHEN

Not bad.

HOWARD

Same question to you, Peter.

PETER

Oh, crap! I don't know. Stephen, you go with your sex novel.

STEPHEN

(rubbing hands together)

Okay, let's see. All right, check it out. So this pandemic happens, right? And pretty much everybody on Earth is infected.

MARY

That's original.

STEPHEN

Wait! But not everyone is dying from the virus! A select few are immune, okay?

MARY

I repeat my earlier claim of skepticism.

STEPHEN

Hold on, would you? There's more! Uh, the immune divide themselves into two groups. One evil and one good. And they end up battling each other in the climax!

(The others murmur tepid approval.)

STEPHEN

Seriously? Annie gets the Golden Globe and I get, "eh?"

PETER

No, it's good, Stephen. It could use some meat though.

STEPHEN

Meat?

PETER

Yeah, you know. Something to spice it up a little.

STEPHEN

This coming from the guy who can't even come up with his own story.

PETER

No, I got one now. I got one.

STEPHEN

Let's hear it then, Mister Critic.

(PETER clears his throat.)

PETER

Now, this is just rough, okay? Off the cuff. (Clears throat again.) So, this woman moves into the neighborhood and she's hot, right? I mean, smoking hot! She -

MARY

Oh, my God.

PETER

It's my story, Mary, okay? Have a little respect. (A beat.) Anyways, she moves in and ends up seducing these four local boys. They end up having orgies and stuff, but one night (pauses for effect) she dies! I don't know, mysterious accident or something...and these boys panic. They make a pact to hide her body.

STEPHEN

This sounds convoluted.

PETER

As if you even know the definition. (A beat.) They stow her body in her car and drive it into the lake!

ANNE

Oh, Jesus.

PETER

But as they're watching it go under the water...she wakes in terror! Her eyes are all they see as the car disappears beneath the murky depths!

BRAM

Oh, yes! Now that rocks, Pete! Yes!

MARY

Peter, that's really good.

STEPHEN

I like mine better.

PETER

I mean, there'd be more, but you get the picture. She starts to haunt them, even as they get older.

HOWARD

Cool. Very cool, Peter. How about you, Mary? You got a story?

MARY

Oh, yeah. It's juicy. Sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll, baby.

STEPHEN

Really?

MARY

No, you jerk. Why do you always transfer all your perversion on everyone else.

STEPHEN

Because I'm a pervert.

PETER

Great. Anyways...

MARY

No, mine's a little bit on the dark side.

ANNE

Because vampires are not dark enough?



MARY

I'm not saying that. Listen up, pupils. This doctor...a surgeon...returns to his country of origin...like the motherland...and takes up residence in the ancient home of his family.

HOWARD

Right up my alley.

BRAM

Shush, Howard!

MARY

He ends up discovering that all the people who live about the region despised his family. They talk about them in a real derogatory way, calling them demons and stuff.

PETER

Nice.

MARY

One day, he's had it! He's done with these ignorant slack-jaws. He ends up gathering together the body parts of random corpses. Digs them right out of the graveyard, right? Then, he fetches a brain from the local university and puts it into the head of this sewn-together beast!

HOWARD

Excellent!

MARY

He raises this monster up to the roof of the house during a terrific lightning storm and when the strike hits the body...it comes to life!

(Eruption of applause.)

PETER

Mary, well done! Bravo!

MARY

Thanks.

STEPHEN

So, what happens next?

MARY

What? I don't know. Something gruesome...obviously. Maybe he eats his creator or something.

STEPHEN

Convoluted.

BRAM

(brandishing fist)

My knuckles are convoluting toward your face!

HOWARD

You didn't go yet, Bram.

ANNE

Yeah, Abraham. What's your tale?

(BRAM imitates MARY mockingly.)

BRAM

Well, Ann-nee...(scoffs). I haven't really thought about it, since all you geniuses seem to have already contemplated ahead of time.

PETER

Contemplated? (Laughs.) Careful, Bram. That's a two-hundred-dollar word.

BRAM

(scowling)

I suppose I would write the story something like this. This guy goes overseas to have property documents signed by a potential buyer who's moving to the States.

STEPHEN

Sounds like Mary's story.

BRAM

Well, it's different, okay? It's completely different!  
(Calms himself.) So, while he's there, he gets seduced by -

PETER

Uh oh, sounds like MY story.

BRAM

Oh, my God, people! Would you just shut it for three seconds? (Calms himself again.) He gets seduced by the count's wives. They're trying to turn him into a vampire.

(The crowd shouts out in disappointment and laughter.)

BRAM

Let me finish! Annie's vampires are, like, civilized! Mine are like animals. They come back to the states and the count is looking to add another wife to his vampire family and falls for the fiancée of the realtor.

STEPHEN

Now, this is the exact definition of convoluted. Am I right?

BRAM

Whatever, virus-boy! At least mine has sex in it.

STEPHEN

Mine will, too!

ANNE

(softly)

Boys?

(They all look at ANNE.)

ANNE

It's Howard's turn.

HOWARD

Oh, hey, sweet. (Pushes up glasses.) Well, I can't really say that my story will be exciting. More like a thriller, edge-of-your-seat, Hitchcock-type tale.

MARY

Sounds awesome.

BRAM

Sounds boring.

ALL

Shush!

HOWARD

So, I've actually had these thoughts...you know...since the accident. About other dimensions. I've been thinking about Shirley and where she may have gone and...I don't know...how she's faring against all the potential scary things out there in the beyond.

PETER

Scary things? Like what, Howard?

ANNE

Yeah, like, what are you talking about?

HOWARD

Okay, so, my thoughts have been wrapped around death and the afterlife. Stuff like that.

BRAM

Dude, you are seriously not considering offing yourself, are you?

HOWARD

What? No! No, of course not. My mind has been wondering about what kinds of things are out there...(reaches out hand)...in front of us, all around us. Like, they're there, but...we can't see them or touch them.

BRAM

So, they're not there.

(STEPHEN and PETER chuckle.)

HOWARD

No, they are there, but...okay, let me tell you my idea.

ANNE

That'd be good.

HOWARD

All right, so this would be told from the perspective of the author...me...

PETER

First person.

HOWARD

Right. The narrator would begin explaining that he has a terrifying tale to tell. It involves his penchant for -

BRAM

Pension? Like with the unions?

HOWARD

Pen-chant. Like habit?

BRAM

Pension?

MARY

Just listen, you dope!

HOWARD

The narrator likes to write about local history. Especially when the history has mysterious underpinnings...tainted with the occult.

(BRAM moans loudly.)

HOWARD

He ends up taking a broken-down bus to a small bay town where all the inhabitants have really weird fishlike eyes and aquatic attributes. No one wants to go there, but this guy wants to know why! Why all the denizens of this town look like this.

STEPHEN

Okay. Getting better.

HOWARD

At one point, everyone in the town basically shuns him because he's an outsider.

But this old drunk sea captain begins telling him a horrifying tale of curses and deals with demon gods and how the founder of the town gave his soul over in exchange for wealth.

MARY

Okay, this is creepy.

HOWARD

Well, suffice it to say that the man misses his bus out of town and has to spend the night at the hotel. The same hotel that everyone was telling him to avoid! But he has no choice. He's also told not to set foot outside after dark!

BRAM

So, what happens?

HOWARD

His door knob is turned in the middle of the night and he hears these hideous noises from inside the hotel. Finally, he sneaks a peek outside the window and witnesses thousands of these fish-frog creatures streaming from all the houses he thought were empty. They're all running into the ocean!

MARY

Okay, okay, Howard. Get to the punchline.

HOWARD

Well, in the end, the author, who has escaped the town and called the authorities, reveals a terrible secret. That he's been recently showing signs that he, too, is transforming into one of these monsters. He has discovered that he is the descendent of the founder of this town and the curse has found him!

PETER

Crazy!

ANNE

That's got real potential, Howard.

BRAM

Not bad for a geek, dude.

STEPHEN

Mine's still better.

(Everyone laughs. Suddenly ANNE stands up rigidly and holds up her hands.)

ANNE

Stop! Quiet.

(Silence.)

BRAM

Is it time?

ANNE

Quiet!

(ANNE moves out of the circle and begins to turn slowly. The night noises, including the sounds of the lapping water, recede and finally cease.)

ANNE

She's here.

(The others stand and begin looking around, pacing here and there.)

STEPHEN

Where is she, Annie? Can you see her?

(ANNE stops rotating and points toward the rise of the trail leading to the lake. The others turn to view the small, sandy hill. From behind the hill emerges a glowing, shimmery figure. It's Shirley and she is dressed like an angelic form in white clothing.

She comes slowly down the trail and stops in front of the others who are in awe...speechless. Peter drops to his knees, as do the others, except for Anne and Brad. Brad goes forward and reaches out a hand. Shirley reaches forward and grasps his hand.

BRAM

(falling to his knees  
quickly)

Oh, Jesus Christ!

SHIRLEY

Oh, my friends, I've missed you.

ANNE

Shirley?

SHIRLEY

(to ANNE)

Annie, you always had such a perceptive heart.

ANNE

I've missed you so much.

SHIRLEY

I know, I know. And you must all have so many questions.

HOWARD

Where have you been all this time?

SHIRLEY

Where? (A long beat.) I can't say, Howard. In a place that was dark and frightening.

MARY

Shirley...the accident...when you left us...it's all just a blur.



SHIRLEY

And I have so much to tell you about that. About the guilt that kept me from moving on. About the shame that held me prisoner.

STEPHEN

It wasn't your fault, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Oh, but it was, Stephen. It was. You may not have known some of the things that were plaguing my life at that time, but I was the driver and my mind was preoccupied with something else.

BRAM

(sobbing)

That son-of-a-bitch was on our side of the road! He's responsible!

SHIRLEY

I'm not here to blame someone else, Bram. I'm here to tell you what happened. Do you remember why we were coming up here to the lake?

PETER

It was a celebration of some sort, wasn't it?

SHIRLEY

No, dear Peter. It was a getaway. An escape from my troubles.

HOWARD

I remember.

(All eyes turn toward HOWARD.)

HOWARD

It was for you, Shirley. I suggested that we come up here...because you had just lost your mother.

(SHIRLEY is smiling and nodding.)

MARY

Oh, my God, I remember, too!

SHIRLEY

My mother had just passed away from cancer and I was having trouble coping with here death. We were coming up here to help me forget my pain. Of course, we never made it.

ANNE

I'm so sorry.

SHIRLEY

No, sweetheart. None of this was your fault. None of you were responsible. I was thinking about my mother, I was driving...on autopilot...when that driver fell asleep at the wheel and came into our lane.

STEPHEN

He was drunk!

SHIRLEY

No. He just fell asleep. He died in that accident, too.

ANNE

We tried to save you, Shirley!

BRAM

I pulled you from the car! Away from the wreck!

SHIRLEY

I know, sweet Bram.

PETER

Your arm! Shirley! Your arm!

HOWARD

Oh, my God, yes! Your arm was severed!

MARY

I remember! I remember!

(SHIRLEY smiles and holds up her left arm and waves.)

SHIRLEY

All better now.

ANNE

But...

SHIRLEY

It's incredible what the afterlife heals, my friends.

ANNE

So, where are you going now?

SHIRLEY

Nowhere, Annie. I'm here to stay. I've come to be here with all of you.

BRAM

But, how? How can you stay? Don't you have a...final...um...destination?

SHIRLEY

Sit down, everyone.

(Everyone sits slowly as SHIRLEY seats herself in their center.)

SHIRLEY

I came here to tell you about my extreme sorrow. I struggled with these thoughts and they made me sad, but the afterlife, it heals soul and spirit.

PETER

I don't understand, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

I know. You've all been expecting me for years and you didn't know why.

ANNE

I could feel you coming to us...over and over again.

SHIRLEY

Oh, my friends, there were many times when I wanted to come to you, but I was held back by my terrible grief.

HOWARD

What changed, Shirley? Why now?

SHIRLEY

I finally realized that I missed you all so much, I let go of all my sadness and guilt and resolved to reveal myself to you.

MARY

I wish you hadn't waited so long.

SHIRLEY

As do I. But, my friends, I'm here to tell you something else about that day of the accident so many years ago.

ANNE

(sobbing)

We're so sorry, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

You pulled me from the car and Bram, you went back to save the driver of the other car.

BRAM

No, I didn't.

SHIRLEY

Yes. You did. You went to his door and smashed the window to get it open.

HOWARD

I helped!

SHIRLEY

(smiling)

Yes.

HOWARD

So did Mary and Peter.

SHIRLEY

You all helped.

(Silence.)

PETER

(softly)

There was a fire.

SHIRLEY

The engine of the car caught fire and ignited the fuel that had spilled on the pavement. The explosion was massive and hot. Do you remember?

(Silence.)

SHIRLEY

My sweet friends. On that day, eighteen years ago, all of you were killed trying to save that man.

(ANNE stands and looks confused.  
She begins to walk around the  
group. The others are in shock.)

ANNE

Where have you been, Shirley?

SHIRLEY

Dear friends (a long beat) I was the only survivor of that crash.

(ANNE puts her hands over her ears  
and shrieks loudly. PETER climbs  
to his feet and backs away  
unsteadily. MARY collapses into  
BRAM's arms. STEPHEN puts his head  
into his hands and sobs. Howard  
hangs his head in sadness.

STEPHEN

(looking up again)

That's impossible. (shouting) It's not possible!

SHIRLEY

It happened, Stephen. It did. Eighteen long years ago.

HOWARD

But you haven't aged.

SHIRLEY

Cures the grief and heals the soul. My friends, I'm here with you now. And I'm not leaving you.

BRAM

So, for the past eighteen years, you abandoned us, Shirley! Didn't care what happened to us!

SHIRLEY

On the contrary, Bram. For the past eighteen years, I died inside. My grief over your deaths and the immense guilt I bore over the accident was nearly insurmountable.

PETER

(drawing closer to the  
circle)

Shirley, you left us...but you never left our hearts.

MARY

There were so many times (sobs) times when you seemed like you were right there. We came here year after year to see you.

ANNE

I was so sure that you were coming in past years, but...

SHIRLEY

Those were the times when I thought that I was ready to join you.

STEPHEN

You mean...

SHIRLEY

I mean that I contemplated my own death many times.

ANNE

And now?

SHIRLEY

I finally followed through.

ANNE

Oh, Shirley!

(ANNE runs to embrace SHIRLEY and begins crying. The others close the circle and do a group hug. BRAM is the only one who holds back momentarily before MARY gazes back toward him and offers a hand. BRAM takes her hand and joins the group in embrace. Finally, after a long moment, they break off and stare at SHIRLEY.

HOWARD

So, what do we do now, Shirley?

SHIRLEY

Now, my sweet Howard...we live.

**THE END**